

RICHARD C. FROESCHNER: A WIFE'S VIEW

ELSIE HERBOLD FROESCHNER

When Tom Henry and Al Wheeler asked me to write a paper for this volume honoring Dick, I wondered how I could describe in a few pages the many years of collaboration and forty-five years of marriage to someone I consider a fine scientist, philosopher, distinguished teacher, semanticist, and man of high standards, but also one who can relate to the everyday world.

The time is 1938-39, my first year as medical and biological artist at the University of Missouri. A friend, an odonatologist from my Alma Mater, the University of Michigan, came to visit and to use the insect study collection. After a few day's work at the Entomology Department, she told me of a very knowledgeable young entomologist who had been studying insects since he was ten years old. After a field trip with this man, she remarked I should go out with him and learn about the local fauna and flora, especially the insects! That was my first knowledge of Richard Charles Froeschner.

Since I was responsible for research illustration in seven departments, I did not get near the Entomology Department for months. Finally, an assignment to illustrate a piece of inflamed throat tissue from a cow with a bot warble fly infestation brought me to work there. Quite casually I met Dick. It was the beginning of our long and loving association.

Dick's college career began in 1937 because of a Miss Mary McCarty, a high school science teacher, who believed in him and his ability so much that she volunteered, in the midst of the Depression, to drive him to the University of Missouri, pay his entrance fees, buy books, and give him money for room and board for one month. Mind you, this was a loan, not a gift.

Soon after beginning undergraduate work, Dick began to envision a study of the Hemiptera of Missouri. Already familiar with the midwestern Hemiptera and their ranges, he soon was projecting what should be found in the state. However, much survey work was needed. He had an old Model A Ford and with gas 10¢ a gallon (yes it really was), we started collecting. Dick soon realized that he needed many illustrations for the planned publication. He could do them, but his studies didn't allow the time, and because he had only \$15.00 a month for room and board, he couldn't hire them done. By this time, I believed in him and his work so firmly that I volunteered to contribute some pen and ink drawings to be done at night and on weekends. We spent many hours on this project when he wasn't engaged in his studies and I in my daily illustration work.

These common interests deepened our friendship and we were married in 1940, the same year that Part I of the Hemiptera of Missouri was published. Following his B.S. degree, Dick worked as assistant to the State Entomologist of Missouri and then in 1943 became the state representative on a project dealing with the introduced scale insect *Parlatoria chinensis* in St. Louis. He continued work on the Hemiptera of Missouri, and I worked on drawings for the next sections.



Fig. 1. Dick and Elsie Froeschner collection in Franklin County, Missouri, Spring, 1943.

In 1944 our first daughter Ellen was born. World War II was in progress and shortly Dick was drafted. He served as Chief Ward Master at an army hospital in Florida. Later, while stationed in Utah, he was about to be sent to Washington to work on insect projects when the war ended.

Returning to St. Louis in 1946, he became Chief Curator and Head of the Science Museum of the St. Louis Academy of Sciences housed in a good-sized mansion. He planned all sorts of programs, exhibits, and wrote detailed descriptions of all the artifacts in a clear, lucid style. I painted the backgrounds of the cases, printed signs, and generally helped with exhibits. Dick collaborated in writing a paper on man's early flight, touching on Montgolfier's balloons and other examples of man's attempt at flight.

By now he had published Parts II (1942) and III (1944) of the Hemiptera series and papers on the Cercopidae, Cicadidae, Erotylidae, Languriidae, and Neuroptera of Missouri. In 1948, Dick received an invitation from Dr. Joseph Bequaert at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University to work on their Hemiptera collection. With a new baby daughter Kay added to the family, Dick built a platform for the back seat of our car, converted it to a comfortable play pen for Ellen and Kay, and we traveled east to Cambridge, Massachusetts for three months.

Graduate school soon beckoned at Iowa State College (now University). Drs. Carl Drake, Harry Knight, and Halbert Harris encouraged Dick to get his advanced degrees. He began by working on the grasshoppers and other Orthoptera of Iowa for his Master's thesis. I happily contributed more than 120 pen and ink drawings.

For his Ph.D., he returned to the Hemiptera with a monograph of the "Cydnidae of the Western Hemisphere." Published by the Smithsonian Press, this work may have been the first step toward our later association with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

During our stay at Iowa State, we enjoyed many Saturday nights at the home of his adviser Dr. Harry Knight and his wife Jessie. There we watched television (it



Fig. 2. Dick Froeschner in his office, Smithsonian Institution, 1986.

would be years before we had a TV), often in the company of José Carvalho, a fellow graduate student and hemipterist, and his wife Milza. We also become acquainted with other grad students working on Hemiptera—Leonard Kelton, Joseph Schaffner, and James Slater. The wives in this close-knit department formed a social club known as “The Grubs” and organized picnics and other outings.

As a new Ph.D., Dick became Assistant Professor of Zoology and Entomology at Montana State College at Bozeman, where our family spent some happy years. Dick taught beginning zoology, general entomology, systematic entomology, and advised graduate students. That he was an excellent teacher was demonstrated in 1958 when he was voted distinguished Teacher of the Year by a faculty committee, a college board group, and student committee. The award was both a certificate of honor, plus a cash award. His department head, Dr. James Pepper, stated that “Dr. Froeschner is a natural born teacher and his first interest is always the student. His teaching is by no means confined to the class room as he is always helping students, whether or not they are in his particular classes.” He was very popular with students, as he lectured clearly and concisely and illustrated his lectures with spontaneous chalk drawings on the blackboard. They loved the mice he drew to illustrate problems in genetics. He prodded them to think, and think, and think again. Often Dick and his students would hold heated debates on many subjects, including one on infinity to which even physics graduate students came. Dick often took one side of a question, argued it, and suddenly reversed his stand, forcing the students to reverse their

thinking. The students who engaged in these sessions enjoyed them—I believe it made them sharpen their thinking powers.

The workload of over thirty classroom hours in lecture and laboratories did not leave much time for his own research on Hemiptera. He did, however, manage to work on building the college insect collection and somehow found time to go on many field trips with his students. Eventually though, with some regret, he decided to leave teaching to devote his time to research in Hemiptera.

In 1960 he accepted a position as Hemipterist with the Systematic Entomology Laboratory staff at the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. A little disappointed there, he returned to teaching entomology at the University of Montana for a year, followed by a summer session at the University of Montana Biological Station. He was fortunate to get a special group of students who became so enthusiastic that they began all night studying marathons, with various kinds of background music to help keep them awake. For our family, wonderful field trips in that beautiful mountain country made that summer a most memorable one.

In the fall of 1962, Dr. J. F. Gates Clarke, then Chairman of the Department of Entomology at the Smithsonian Institution, asked Dick to join the staff in the Department as Curator of Hemiptera, which he did so with enthusiasm. Some people might say he is happy as a clam but perhaps more appropriate to his work, I would say he is as happy “as a bug in a rug.”

Lest you think all his waking hours are concerned with Hemiptera, one activity that has been a yearly highlight in our family since Ellen's first Christmas is the creation of a new Christmas scene for under our tree. The scenes are about 3 feet wide and 1.5 feet deep. Dick and I designed each one—he carved the wooden figures up to 6 inches tall, I painted and dressed them, he mechanized them with motors under the stage, I painted the scenery, and by our collaboration, we turned out beautiful scenes, some even of bugs (mostly of the “lady bug” variety, however). Our most ambitious scene of a Gay 90's Christmas Party had fourteen moving figures! But the marvel of it all to me was how Dick arranged each figure's movement, all by the use of 2 or 3 motors, one being an old phonograph motor that he had to gear down to slow the motion.

In a paper on the new genus *Elsiella*, Dick wrote a paragraph dedicated to me, and now I'd like to respond. In the forty-five years of our marriage, his wide and deep knowledge of entomology and other biological fields, philosophy and semantics, his great teaching skill, his appreciation and constant encouragement of my career as a scientific illustrator, his willingness to help others, and ability to always see humor in the world have enriched my life more than I can ever say.